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## Strife in Czechoslovakia: The German Minority Question BY KARL FALK

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# Strife in Czechoslovakia: The German Minority Question

BY KARL FALK

*with the aid of the Research Staff of the Foreign Policy Association*

Dr. Falk, who has studied abroad and traveled extensively in Central Europe, is now preparing a book on Upper Silesia.

BOHEMIA, the classical land of the nationality struggle, is once more in the limelight as the Czechoslovak government faces the insistent demands of its Sudetic German minority for autonomy and better treatment. The problem has assumed international proportions, since these demands are backed by the German Reich which, according to the Czechs, is merely using the Sudetic minority as an instrument for its expansionist aims. Austro-German union has made Czechoslovakia fear that it may become the next object of Germany's attention. The Republic's determination to resist to the bitter end any attempted infringement of its sovereignty was clearly stated in Premier Hodza's Parliamentary declaration of March 4. The Sudetic minority problem is also complicated by the clash of the totalitarian principles of the Third Reich and the majority of the Sudetic Germans with the democratic concepts of the Czechs and Slovaks and the democratic part of the German minority.

The tension prevailing in the Sudetenlands was revealed on October 17, 1937 at Teplitz-Schoenau when, in the confusion following a political demonstration, Czechoslovak police clubbed and arrested German members of the Czechoslovak Parliament accompanying Konrad Henlein, leader of the Nazi-*Sudetendeutsche* party. Following this incident, a violent press campaign was launched in the Reich against Czechoslovakia, and Herr Henlein addressed an open letter to the President of the Czechoslovak Republic demanding immediate removal of *Sudetendeutsche* grievances and fulfillment of their demands for cultural autonomy. Relations between the German minority and Prague, as well as between Prague and Berlin, are so strained that the Western powers fear another such incident might precipitate war in Central Europe.

This fear explains in part why the French Foreign Minister, M. Delbos, on his visit to Prague on

December 17, is reported to have suggested that certain concessions be made to reconcile the Sudetic German minority.<sup>1</sup> Interested groups in Great Britain are also anxiously pressing for a Czech-German understanding before it is too late. Franco-British interest in this problem is due to a desire not only to preserve peace for the present but also to maintain the future balance of power on the Continent. France and Britain fear that Germany might take steps threatening the independence of Czechoslovakia, which is the only democratic outpost in Central Europe, as well as a strategic obstacle blocking Germany's expansion to the southeast.

The internal importance of the German minority problem to the Czechoslovak state is evidenced by the numerical strength and location of the Germans. They are the largest minority in Czechoslovakia and, after the Ukrainians in Poland, the largest national minority in Europe.

The grievances of these Germans—expressed in charges of “denationalization” and discrimination by the Czechs in violation of constitutionally guaranteed rights—have become a European problem to a far greater extent than similar grievances of other minorities in and out of Czechoslovakia. This is chiefly due to the geographical situation of the Germans, who live mainly in a belt adjacent to Austria and the German Reich. Flanked on three sides by Germany, with its 67 million people insisting on better treatment for the Sudetic minority, the position of Czechoslovakia, with its 15 million inhabitants, is not enviable.

The Czechoslovak authorities admit that some of the German grievances are not unfounded, but deny the seriousness of several German charges and claim that treatment of the minorities in Czechoslovakia is better than in other countries. Many of them fear to make concessions in the belief that the Sudetic Germans are being used by the

1. Cf. *New York Times*, December 18, 1937.

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Reich merely to gain control of Czechoslovakia and Southeastern Europe. Nor have their fears been allayed by Germany's refusal to negotiate any sort of collective security pact in Eastern Europe. Instead, Germany has urged bilateral arrangements which, according to the Czechs, would more or less put the weaker Central and Southeastern European nations at the mercy of a much stronger Germany.

The Sudetic minority problem is complicated by the attitude of the Sudetic Germans, the temper and policy of the Czechs, and the extreme economic distress of the Sudetic areas, the causes of which in general lie beyond the control of either group. The rôle of the Third Reich as champion of the Sudetic grievances, and the conflict between totalitarian and democratic principles have made a solution of the problem still more difficult.

The psychological factors involved in the Sudetic or, for that matter, any European minority problem often seem insignificant and petty from a distance, but they assume an exaggerated importance in the everyday life of the people involved. In examining the Sudetic question, it is necessary to recall the traditional hatred between Slav and German, resulting partly from the latter's attitude of superiority to the Slav who, now liberated and on top, finds it hard to be generous to his former master. Germans who have become separated through post-war settlements from their co-nationals—in this case from Austrians—have often made their position more difficult by their refusal and inability to adapt themselves to changed circumstances or to acknowledge the right to existence of the new states in which they live. On the other hand, they feel that they have a right to have their children educated in the language and culture of their parents and feel that they should not be treated as "outlaws" in the lands in which they were once rulers. In Czechoslovakia the Germans are bitterly resisting the steady advance of the Czechs on the German ethnographic frontier. Although Czechs and Germans have lived together for centuries in Bohemia, they could hardly be farther apart than they are today.

#### POPULATION AND LANGUAGE STATISTICS

The Sudetic Germans, deriving their name from the Sudete mountain regions which some of them inhabit in the north of Bohemia, comprise over  $3\frac{1}{3}$  million inhabitants and from one-fifth to one-fourth of the country's total population.<sup>1a</sup> Most of

1a. According to the 1930 census, of the 15 million inhabitants in the 54,000 square miles of the Czechoslovak Republic, 9.7 million were Czechoslovaks (approximately 7.4 million Czechs and 2.3 million Slovaks), 3.2 million Germans, 700,000 Magyars (Hungarians), 550,000 Ruthenians (Sub-Carpathian Russians), 187,000 Jews and 131,000 Poles and other nationalities.

them inhabit the former Austrian crown lands of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia, where they represent respectively 30, 20 and 40 per cent of the population. They are chiefly massed along the Czech frontier opposite the German Reich and Austria in a horseshoe-shaped belt covering an area about the size of Belgium and extending sometimes more than 60 miles inland and, at one point, to within 20 miles of Prague. In the areas closer to the frontier, the Germans constitute from 80 to 100 per cent of the population. In the interior there is a fairly sharp line of demarcation between German and Czech language frontiers, and only at a few points does the latter push through to the national boundary. Although there are some German enclaves in the interior and 40,000 Germans living in Prague, 86 per cent of them live in almost solid German majority areas.<sup>2</sup>

From the end of the 17th to the end of the 19th century there was little change in the language frontier. Since 1900 the Czechoslovak proportion in the population has been increasing slowly but steadily,<sup>3</sup> and since 1931 the balance has probably shifted still more in their favor.

Economic and strategic reasons account for the importance of the German regions to the Republic. The German belt includes important mining and industrial areas of Czechoslovakia, which inherited roughly 80 per cent of the partitioned Austro-Hungarian Empire's industries. Although greatly weakened, the Germans still occupy an important position in the economic life of the new state. They have been losing ground since the establishment of the Republic but not without resisting and resisting what the Czechs term a "natural advance" into German territory.

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Both Czechs and Germans claim to have been the original inhabitants of the region. The Czechs argue that the Germans merely came as "colonists," while the Germans claim that Germanic tribes inhabited the area before the migrations of the Slavs in the 5th and 6th centuries. The real nationality struggle between Germans and Czechs in Bohemia began after the revolution of 1848 when

2. Cf. *Besitzstand und Gefahrenlage des Sudetendeutschums* (Karlsbad, K. H. Frank, 1935), p. 18.

3. POPULATION ACCORDING TO LANGUAGE IN BOHEMIA AND MORAVIA-SILESIA

	Czechoslovaks		Germans	
1880	5,113,208	62.95%	2,927,684	36.04%
1890	5,408,526	62.9%	3,087,193	35.9%
1900	5,848,614	62.93%	3,289,623	35.39%
1910	6,335,633	63.41%	3,492,362	34.95%
1921	6,730,763	68.54%	2,973,418	30.28%
1930	7,308,900	69.5%	3,070,938	29.19%

Czechs and Germans, who had previously often presented a united front, separated—the Czechs sending their delegates to the Pan Slavic Congress in Prague and the Germans their representatives to the Parliament of Frankfurt, Germany. During the latter half of the 19th century Austria's political life was filled with manifestations of the Czech agitation for autonomy and complete decentralization. The large masses of Czech peasants resented the fact that Germans, who were in a minority, dominated public life in Bohemia. With the weakening of the Austrian Empire, Vienna, although sympathizing with the Germans in Bohemia, was unable to help them halt the Czech advance in the German and mixed-language areas.

#### ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK REPUBLIC

While Czech troops fought in Austrian armies against Prussia in 1866 and against the Entente in 1914-1918, the World War provided the long-sought opportunity for the realization of Czech national aims. Large numbers deserted and enlisted in the Allied ranks on the Russian and Western fronts. Meanwhile, two illustrious exiles, Masaryk and Beneš, were paving the way in France, Britain and the United States for the establishment of an independent republic. It is sometimes said that Czechoslovakia was founded in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on May 30, 1918 through the unity pact concluded between Czechs and Slovaks who had emigrated to the United States. Its declaration of independence was proclaimed in Washington, D. C., after the liberation of Czechoslovakia had been made one of the Allied war aims. In October 1918, by the declaration of the Czech National Council in Prague and the Slovaks at Turč. Sv. Martin, the Czechs and Slovaks severed relations with Austria and Hungary and proclaimed an independent and united Czechoslovakia. Its frontiers were fixed by the peace treaties of St. Germain, Versailles and Trianon.

Germans point out that the Czechoslovak memoranda presented to the Peace Conference, especially "Mémoire 3" dealing with the question of the Germans of Bohemia, promised a liberal régime with model treatment of minorities in the new state.<sup>4</sup> In granting the Czech claim to the "historic frontiers of the Bohemian crown" (Bohemia, Moravia and Austrian Silesia), the

4. For the Czech view, cf. Dr. E. Beneš, *Světová válka a naše revoluce* (The Great War and Our Revolution), published in English under the title *My War Memoirs* (Boston, Houghton, Mifflin, 1928); and *Germany and Czechoslovakia, II* (Prague, Orbis, 1937). For the German view, cf. Dr. H. Raschhofer, *Die tschechoslowakischen Denkschriften für die Friedenskonferenz von Paris 1919/20* (Berlin, Heymann, 1937), and *Die*

Peace Conference permitted the inclusion of the German minority area for strategic and economic reasons, since it was felt that Czechoslovakia would not be capable of independent existence without it. The Germans protested against what they termed a "violation of the Wilsonian principle of self-determination" and tried to attach themselves unsuccessfully to the Austrian Republic. Their demand for a plebiscite or submission of the matter to international arbitration was refused by the Peace Conference. To prevent a repetition of the mistakes of the minority policy of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Allies required Czechoslovakia to enter into a minority treaty similar to that concluded between the Allies and Poland, whereby the new state guaranteed "to protect the interests of inhabitants of that state who differ from the majority of the population in race, language, or religion." The Czechoslovak constitution, drawn up without the participation of the Germans and promulgated on February 29, 1920, promised equal civic and political rights, liberty and respect of religious confession, and freedom of the press and public assembly. It further guaranteed minorities complete liberty in the use of their own language in private and business concerns, equal cultural and educational rights, and expressly prohibited any forcible denationalization.

Since the establishment of the Republic, the position of the Germans has been one of the chief problems of Czechoslovakia. Their complaints of violation of minority rights have often been on the agenda of the League of Nations in Geneva, and the present charges and counter-charges of Germans and Czechs show that rapprochement between the two groups is still a long way off.

#### POST-WAR INTERNAL POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

In politics, Germans and Czechs have always voted exclusively along national lines. Sudetic parties, like those of other German minorities in Europe, have shown the same development as political parties in the German Reich. In the first elections of May 1920 the German parties polled 25.6 per cent of the total vote and, at the first session of the new Parliament, withdrew after issuing a joint declaration<sup>5-6</sup> of opposition to the Czechs, which

*tschechische Lüge* (Berlin, Volk und Reich, 1937), vol. 13, no. 6. For the view of the American representative at the Peace Conference, cf. David Hunter Miller, *My Diary at the Conference of Paris* (vol. 13, New States, Minorities).

5-6. Headed by their leader, Senator Lodge, the Germans proclaimed that the Czechoslovak state had been created against their will, that it was the outcome of violence, and that they did not intend to abandon their claim to the right of "self-determination," which had been violated by the inclusion of the German areas in the Czechoslovak Republic. They also reiterated their demand for racial autonomy in the German regions, with local administration to be left in their own hands.



marked the beginning of a policy of non-cooperation and mutual distrust. In 1922 the German Federation, which comprised all the German parties except the Social Democrats, split into two camps: a "working front" (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft*) and a "fighting front" (*Kampfgemeinschaft*), a cleavage which still persists. The former group, including the German Agrarians and Christian Socialists, favored a policy of cooperation with the Czechs and hence received the name "Activists," while the latter, composed of German Nationalists and National Socialists, formed the opposition and were styled "Negativists."

In 1926 two members of the German Activist parties were invited to join the Cabinet, but their collaboration, although it relieved the racial tensions somewhat, failed to effect the fundamental changes hoped for by the Germans. In 1929 the German Social Democrats joined the Activist bloc when one of their members replaced the Christian Socialist Minister. With the onset of the depression, however, the task of Czech-German understanding was thrust into the background by more urgent economic and social problems.

The culmination of the post-war Negativist movement was the formation of the *Sudetendeutsche Partei* (Sudetic German party) in 1934, when the German Nationalist and National Socialist parties, anticipating dissolution by the Czechoslovak authorities, went into voluntary liquidation and merged with the new German *Heimatfront*, a cultural association headed by Konrad Henlein, until then leader of the German *Turnverband* (Gymnastic Federation). It adopted the name *Sudetendeutsche Partei* and urged the burying of inner-party differences in the interest of German solidarity. At the next general election of May 15, 1935 it astonished the world, and itself, by polling 1,256,910 or 67.4 per cent of the total German vote, while the combined Activist vote dropped from 1,251,000 in 1929 to 605,122. The Henlein party, which holds 44 of the German minority's 72 seats, is now, along with the Czech Agrarian party, the largest in the Czechoslovak Parliament. None of its members are represented in the Cabinet, and Henlein himself, as a matter of political strategy, is not even a member of Parliament—like Hitler before 1933.

The membership of the Henlein party consists of heterogeneous German elements, unemployed laborers, impoverished middle-class employees,



nationally minded German industrialists and intellectuals. Its spectacular rise may be attributed to the dissatisfaction of Germans with the treatment accorded them by the Czechs who have constituted themselves the leading *Staatsvolk*; the extreme economic distress in the Sudetic areas; and the moral, if not material, support given by the National Socialist movement in the Reich.

The program of the Henlein party is much like that of the National Socialist party in the Reich, except for natural limitations imposed by its operation in a state in which it can never hope to become a majority. Like the Czechs in pre-war years, the Germans demand autonomy, but there is considerable difference of opinion as to what form it should take.

Recently six preparatory bills outlining the Sudetic autonomy demands were submitted by the Henlein party to the Czechoslovak Parliament. The bills propose to organize national groups within Czechoslovakia into corporations of public law and to make any attempt to "denationalize" the members of such a corporation, either by pressure or reward, a penal offense. Each national corporation would be represented by a governing board consisting of its parliamentary deputies and Senators plus such other members as it may draft, and this board would select a "Speaker" as the executive of the national group. Since the *Sudetendeutsche* party represents 67.4 per cent of the total German vote, Henlein would obviously be elected the "Speaker" and *Führer* of all the Sudeten Germans if this plan were accepted. The three Activist parties fear that the result would be a "totalitarian" course within the minority analogous to that in the German Reich, with the exception of such limitations as might be imposed by the central government.<sup>7</sup> The Pan-Germanic ideology of the Sudetic party goes back to the same pre-war sources which inspired the National Socialist party in the Reich. It is understandable that the Pan-

7. *New York Times*, November 14, 1937.

Germanism of the Third Reich has appealed to Germans of Czechoslovakia, as it has to Germans living in other parts of Europe and separated by the peace treaties from their co-nationals. Before the war, the Sudetic Germans gravitated more to Vienna than to Berlin,<sup>8</sup> although separation from Austria-Hungary and union with Germany had been openly advocated in the Austrian Parliament by Wolff and Schoenerer. Since the war, despairing of aid from the small Austrian Republic and disappointed in the protection given by Geneva, many of the Sudetic Germans turned to the Reich for moral support. Long before Hitler's rise to power, the Sudetic National Socialist party maintained close relations with the German National Socialist party. Since that time the connections have become obscured. Opponents charge that the financial support which the Henlein party is allegedly receiving from the Reich may ultimately lead to disaster for all Sudetic Germans.<sup>9</sup>

The rôle of the Reich in championing Sudetic grievances has tended to detract, in world opinion, from the justice of the claims made by Sudetic Germans, and has given the problem an international character. It has made the Czechs feel justified in pursuing a severe policy, which in turn has only served to stiffen the opposition and driven more Sudetic Germans into the Henlein ranks.

#### THE AGREEMENT OF FEBRUARY 18, 1937

Meanwhile, the Prague government, in an effort to counteract the growing influence of the *Sudeten-deutsche Partei* and to continue a policy of partial cooperation with the German Activist parties, has recently supported the Activists by giving them political plums wherever possible, while making no concessions to members of the Sudetic party.<sup>9a</sup> This policy may have come too late, for the Activist parties have already lost a great deal of their backing in the Sudetic ranks, and both camps do not completely trust the motives and sincerity of Czech overtures to improve relations.

On February 18, 1937 Premier Milan Hodza concluded an agreement with the three Activist parties which was hailed by government sympathizers as "the most important event in Czechoslovakia's internal political life in recent years." This agreement, in fact, was an answer to the demands of the Sudetic German party, which repudiated it, and indicates not only the Germans' principal griev-

ances but also the mistakes of the government's minority policy in the past. By the terms of this agreement, the government made the following promises:

1. Governmental public works contracts shall be allotted in proportion to needs of particular areas, and in German districts, local enterprises and local workers shall have first consideration.
2. Social welfare relief shall be distributed with due regard, not only to the number of inhabitants of individual areas, but also to their number of unemployed.
3. The German minority shall receive a "just proportion" of state offices, conditional on the applicant's loyalty to the state, and his knowledge of the state language.
4. The language difficulty shall be ameliorated by translations attached to Czech official texts and by modification of the language of texts for officials according to actual requirements of specific offices.
5. Cultural and educational minorities shall receive a "due proportion" of state financial support.

Both the Activist and Negativist groups of the German minority, although bitterly opposing each other, agree regarding the necessity of prompt fulfillment of these promises by the Czechoslovak government. The Henleinists point out that, although they would be the first to welcome the fulfillment of the February agreement, they fear it is another political declaration intended merely to appease world opinion. They want to see words translated into action and demand that the state place the full weight of its authority behind such promises by making local Czech officials actually carry them out.

The Henleinists accuse the Activists of trying to secure political advantages for themselves by a policy of cooperation with the Czechs. They charge that the February agreement was intended to win votes for the state-supporting and state-supported Activist parties in the elections which were to have been held in the autumn of 1937 in 11,000 communes and in state insurance organizations. These elections, they claim, would have resulted in further Henlein gains if they had not been postponed again for reasons of "preserving public order."

The Activists admit that they are disappointed so far with the meager results of the February agreement,<sup>10</sup> but they have not given up hope that a policy of cooperation between German and Czech democratic parties will bring the desired improvement. As a bargaining weapon, they are able to remind the Czechs that non-fulfillment of the February promises will merely drive more dis-

8. Even now there are two opposing forces within the Henlein party, the one favoring strong cooperation with Reich policies and the other a more moderate and independent course.

9. Josef Fischer, *Ihr Kampf, Die wahren Ziele der Sudeten-deutschen Partei* (Carlsbad, Graphia, 1937).

9a. Cf. *New York Times*, November 17, 1937.

10. Cf. "German and Czech: The Sudetenland," *The Times* (London), December 2 and 3, 1937.

contented Germans into the Henlein movement. They also hope that time will play in their favor, that economic improvement in the Sudetenlands will lessen dissatisfaction and strengthen the appeal of the more moderate parties.

#### ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF THE PROBLEM

The most serious aspect of the Sudetic problem is the interaction between political strife and economic distress.<sup>11</sup> The industrialized Sudetenlands, always particularly sensitive to economic depressions, are still suffering extreme economic distress, which the Germans charge is being exploited by the Czechs to "denationalize" German areas and push back the ethnographic frontier toward the political boundary.<sup>12</sup>

The Czechs deny this charge. They reply that theirs is a "natural advance" which began even before the war. The economic decline, they state, is largely due to structural economic causes beyond their control. They maintain (1) that German Bohemian industries can never hope to regain their pre-war markets, which included 50 million potential purchasers in the Austro-Hungarian Empire; (2) that the obsolescence of German industrial plants and equipment makes them unable to withstand competition, especially that of Japan, in world trade; (3) that German industrialists have invested unwisely, first, by transferring a large part of their funds to Germany, where they were lost in the inflation and, second, by over-expanding capacity during good years; (4) that it is only natural that Czech capital should be interested in building up Czech and not German industry; and (5) that strategic considerations require that vital industries should be removed from

German areas near the Reich frontier to the interior of Czechoslovakia.<sup>13</sup>

Before the war, the Sudetenlands, with 54 of every 100 working persons employed in industry and trade, were the most highly industrialized region in all Europe. In post-war years, but especially since the depression, the once prosperous areas have been hard hit. Many factories have been shut down and abandoned, and often whole communities have been thrown into unemployment. Although there has been some improvement during the past year, a good half of the Republic's unemployed are admittedly Germans,<sup>14</sup> and there is close correlation between the highest unemployment districts and German-language areas. The Germans' position is peculiarly vulnerable, since they have always been engaged more in industry than the Czechs who, as the occupational census shows,<sup>15</sup> have been predominantly engaged in agriculture.

The reversal in their relative economic position has, not unnaturally, embittered the Germans. Before the war they held a dominant position in the economic life of the region.<sup>16</sup> With the partitioning of Austria-Hungary, Czechoslovakia inherited about 80 per cent of the Empire's industries, and of these, again, approximately 80 per cent were German-owned. Since the war, the shift from German to Czech ownership has been estimated by Germans to be roughly as follows:<sup>17</sup>

	German	Czech
1918	80%	20%
1926	60%	40%
1934	40%	60%

After the war, the partial repudiation of Austrian war loans and non-payment for war deliveries were a tremendous blow to the Sudetic economic system and spelled ruin for thousands of indi-

11. A. J. Toynbee, "Czechoslovakia's German Problem," *The Economist* (London), July 10, 1937, p. 73.

12. Cf. Rudolf Thiele, "Tschechoslowakische Proportionalität—ein Staatliches Ordnungsprinzip," *Europäische Revue*, February 1938.

13. Josef Chmelař, *The German Problem in Czechoslovakia* (Czechoslovak Sources and Documents, Prague, Orbis, 1936).

14. *Ibid.* The number of officially "registered" unemployed in Czechoslovakia has developed as follows:

Beginning 1929	53,242	1934	778,000
1930	73,891	1935	818,005
1931	313,511	1936	850,000
1932	486,600	1937	667,500
1933	746,311	1938	459,192

For a Czechoslovak statement of the recent improvement in employment and relief in German districts, cf. M. Hodza, *Nationality Policy in Czechoslovakia* (Prague, Orbis, 1938). According to figures of the German Industrial Association in Czechoslovakia (*Mitteilungen des deutschen Hauptverbandes der Industrie*, Prague, January 15, 1938), of the 12 districts in the Republic with the highest unemployment at present, none are Czech; and of the 12 districts with the lowest unemployment, none are German.

	GERMANS			
	1900	1910	1920	1930
Agriculture and forestry	27.7%	25.0%	24.8%	20.7%
Industry	49.8	49.6	48.8	51.1
	CZECHS			
	1900	1910	1920	1930
Agriculture and forestry	40.8%	36.9%	32.6%	26.0%
Industry	37.1	38.3	39.6	40.9

Cf. Albin Oberschall, *Sudetendeutsche Tageszeitung* (Tetschen, December 25, 1934).

16. In 1911 the revenue of one of the chief taxes (*Erwerbssteuer*) in Bohemia originated as follows: 2.5 million Germans paid a total of 5.7 million Austrian crowns, and 4.2 million Czechs paid a total of 3.1 million Austrian crowns.

17. This estimate is based partly on Czech (J. Hejda) and partly on German (E. Pfohl) figures. It is not always possible to determine the national character of the capital in industries, especially when owned by the minority in the other's area. In pre-war years, for example, certain German-owned industries like the Skoda arms plant in Pilsen were located in Czech language and not Sudetic areas. Many firms are of a mixed character and there is no official national register.



viduals and companies.<sup>18</sup> The shift from German to Czech ownership was accelerated when, in February 1919, bank payments between the former parts of the Monarchy and Czechoslovakia were suspended. Sudetic German branch banks were unable to withdraw their deposits or to obtain credit from their main banks in Vienna and Budapest and, as a result, Sudetic industries had to turn for credit to Czech institutes, such as the Zivnostenska Trade Bank, today the largest bank in Czechoslovakia. In this way, Czech influence over industry was extended and, as a matter of expediency, German enterprises themselves often appointed Czech financiers and politicians as directors. In the course of time, Germans complain, these undertakings came entirely under Czech control, and later the main offices and often the factories themselves were transferred to Prague or interior areas, strengthening Czech industries there.

The Germans charge that Czechs are attempting to denationalize them through economic pressure exerted, for instance, by shutting down branch plants in the Sudetic area; by threatening to dismiss German workers who prefer to send their children to German schools; by importing Czech workers from the interior, when there are already large numbers of German unemployed; by reducing German concerns through high taxation to the verge of bankruptcy, to be financed and taken over later by Czech banks; by withholding public works and armament orders from Sudetic German firms; by favoring Czech areas in the allotment of public funds for relief projects, etc.<sup>18a</sup> With factories being shut down in the Sudetenlands while new ones are being erected in Czech areas, the Germans complain that the Sudetic decline is not due wholly to structural economic causes.

They also criticize the Czechoslovak government's economic and foreign policy as being partly responsible for their present plight. They argue that their condition is due, internally, to the government's prolonged deflationary policy; and, externally, to the policy pursued until very recently of attempting to cooperate economically as well as politically with Czechoslovakia's military allies—Rumania, Yugoslavia, and France—which had less to offer economically than Hungary, Austria

and Germany which, they claim, should be Czechoslovakia's natural trade partners. This policy is blamed for the foreign trade decline in recent years, which has hit Sudetic industries especially hard since they are producing largely for export.

In their complaints the Germans often lose sight of the fact that they are longing for a prosperity which will probably never return. They also overlook the fact that Czech, as well as German, industries have suffered hardships in the re-orientation and rounding-out of the new Republic's economic system, which has been achieved under difficult circumstances. Moreover, Germany's own foreign currency restrictions have contributed indirectly to Sudetic distress, since they have cut off to a large extent the formerly lucrative revenue from Reich German vacationists, for instance, in tourist centers like Carlsbad and Marienbad. Czechoslovakia's trade balance does not permit the exportation of too large a volume of finished goods to Germany,<sup>19</sup> where payment is often made through "blocked mark" or "barter" transactions—especially in cases where Czechoslovakia must first import the original raw materials from other countries and pay for them with its own foreign currency funds. The Czechs fear that, if the Republic becomes too dependent on Germany economically—and the Reich already is Czechoslovakia's chief trade partner—it may eventually be subjected to political domination by the Third Reich.

In agriculture, German farmers charge that they did not share in the land reform carried out from 1920 to 1930. Before the war, both Czech and German peasants complained about the unequal distribution of land, which was largely in the hands of German nobility. Under the land confiscation law of April 16, 1919 the government was authorized to confiscate—with or without payment—and undertake the parceling of all agricultural estates over 150 hectares (about 375 acres) and forest lands over 250 hectares in size.

The Czechoslovak Land Board reported that, up to May 1, 1935, 4,385,000 acres of agricultural and forest land had been subdivided or taken into state ownership. Of this, it is estimated that 1,852,500 acres is in the Sudetic areas and 618,000 acres in Czechoslovak areas, and of the latter much was also German-owned. The Germans complain that by far the largest part of this land was kept by the Czechoslovak state or was given to Czech peasants<sup>19a</sup> for purposes of settlement, with re-

19. Cf. annual report for 1937 by Dr. Englis, Director of the Czechoslovak National Bank, Prague.

19a. According to the Sudeten-German party, 96 per cent of the confiscated land went into Czech hands. Cf. *Besitzstand und Gefahrenlage des Sudetendeutschums*, cited, p. 43.

18. Eighty-nine per cent of the 8-billion-crown war loans in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia were subscribed by Germans. German savings banks invested 77 per cent of their deposits in war loans, while Czech banks invested only 7.5 per cent. It has been privately estimated that the Austrian state's debt to Sudetic industries, which supplied the largest part of Austrian war material, was 4.5 billion crowns.

18a. Cf. Thiele, *Europäische Revue*, February 1938, cited. For the Czechoslovak view, cf. Hodža, *Nationality Policy in Czechoslovakia*, cited.



turned legionnaires being given preference. They resent Czech "colonists" coming into the Sudetic areas as an aggressive "minority within a minority," and point out that, besides pushing back the ethnographic frontier, the land reform has caused large numbers of Germans to leave the land and swell the ranks of the unemployed in the cities.

#### SOCIAL GRIEVANCES

Widespread unemployment has been accompanied by undernourishment, disease, and a general spirit of despair in the Sudetenlands which, as the Germans point out in their propaganda, hold the record for the highest suicide rate in Europe.<sup>20</sup> Czechs contend, however, that these depressed regions are no worse than the emergency districts to be found in other countries, and that the government is now making special efforts to improve conditions in the Sudetenlands.<sup>20a</sup> To this the Germans reply that they feel peculiarly helpless because they are not masters of their own destiny. They complain that the state has not taken adequate measures to combat unemployment distress and that it has also shown discrimination in the distribution of unemployment relief. Organized labor union members who have recently been employed are entitled to unemployment relief under the "Ghent system," with the state and the unions sharing the cost of supporting labor union members. Only about one-third of the Republic's unemployed are assisted in this manner, and the remaining two-thirds depend upon the system of "Czech cards."<sup>21</sup> This system pays a dole of 10 crowns (about 35 cents, present exchange) a week to single unemployed and 20 crowns to married unemployed who can present evidence of having been employed and of having paid state unemployment insurance for at least three months since 1929. Since many of the Germans cannot fulfill this qualification, they are not entitled to even this benefit. Members of the *Sudetendeutsche* party complain that local relief administrators grant preference to Czechs and members of the German Activist parties over those of the Henleinists in distributing relief.

#### PUBLIC SERVICE

Another grievance touched upon in the February agreement is the matter of proportionate representation in public offices, and the employment of

more German officials, at least in German-majority regions. With the establishment of the new Republic and the setting-up of the Czechoslovak administrative machinery, a great number of German Austrian officials were inevitably retired immediately after the war. From 1921 to 1930, according to official census figures, the number of German officials in public services (administration, courts, postal and railway systems, education, and army) was reduced further by 33,058 positions, while the Czechoslovak participation increased by 39,042. On December 31, 1935, 487,600 persons were employed in state and public service (399,387 Czechoslovaks, 65,634 Germans). The Germans claim that, according to the "nationality key" they should have at least 43,000 more, and the Czechs 72,000 less positions if they are to be proportionately represented.

On the other hand, in view of the attitude toward the state taken by many Germans, the Czechs feel justified in withholding public offices from persons on whose loyalty they feel they cannot depend. They also state that the Germans have always looked down on the Czechs and do not consider it worthwhile to learn their language or become acquainted with their culture. Under these circumstances, they argue, it is difficult for Germans to work as part of a governmental machinery in which Czech is the official language.

#### SCHOOLS AND CULTURAL ASPECTS

While the Czechs feel that they have provided more than adequate minority schooling facilities,<sup>21a</sup> the Germans charge that the standard of instruction in them is low. The Czechs claim that the decline in the total number of German schools is due to the elimination of superfluous German schools, the lower Sudetic birthrate, and the return of "Germanized" Czechs to their own cultural community since the war. Quantitatively, the demand for German schools seems to have been met, at least when compared with minority schooling in other countries. Aside from the small Hultschin district where 39 of the 42 German schools have been closed, at present there are only 15 German municipalities in which there are no German elementary schools where the number of school-children would warrant them. According to official figures,<sup>22</sup> on October 31, 1935 the number of German children attending elementary schools in

20. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

20a. Cf. M. Nečas in *Nationality Policy in Czechoslovakia*, cited, p. 63.

21. Deriving their name from the German Activist Welfare Minister, Dr. Czech, who introduced the system.

21a. Dr. E. Franke, in *Nationality Policy in Czechoslovakia*, cited, p. 56, reports that the average number of children in a class in German elementary schools is 35.7; in the Czechoslovak schools, 38.2.

22. Cited by J. Emlyn Williams, *Christian Science Monitor*, January 26, 1937.

Czechoslovakia was 343,567. Of these, 334,450, or 97 per cent, attended schools where German was the language of instruction. German children attending upper elementary schools numbered 89,864, and 83,563 of these, or 93 per cent, were being taught in their own language. In the secondary schools and universities, the situation is favorable when the "nationality key" is applied, but here the Germans claim that their present educational opportunities should be compared with their pre-war facilities, rather than with those the Czechs have at present. One of their complaints is that the officially prepared German-language textbooks teach the children to despise Germany and the Germans.<sup>22a</sup>

German complaints of "denationalization" are more justified in the case of Czech "minority" schools established in the German majority areas, sometimes for less than 10 children. Over one thousand elementary schools of this type with 2,562 classes, and 228 upper elementary schools with 1,203 classes have been established since the war in German and mixed-language areas. In addition to serving the Czech minority, it is charged that these institutions, deriving support from Czech nationalistic cultural associations, try through promises of material aid to induce unemployed Germans to send their children to Czech schools.

Locally the conflict is carried on by the cultural associations. The German school associations support and establish private schools and kindergartens which Czechs charge are not being conducted in a spirit of complete loyalty to the state. The Czech cultural associations, some of them established long before the war, actively support the Czech minority schools. War veteran organizations and nationalistic associations like the *Narodni Jednota* engage in a number of activities, which include financing Czechs who settle in German regions and exerting what Germans declare to be "semi-official" pressure on local authorities.<sup>23</sup> Their influence and the support they give extremists among Czech officialdom make it difficult to carry out the conciliatory measures projected by the Prague government.<sup>23a</sup>

#### THE NEW DEFENSE LAW

Under the Law for the Defense of the State of March 26, 1936 and subsequent decrees, far-reach-

22a. Cf. "Tschechischer Deutschenhass" (Berlin, *Volk und Reich*, December 1937), p. 828.

23. Cf. *Die Volkstumsarbeit der Tschechen* (Karlsbad, K. H. Frank, 1935).

23a. *The Times* (London), December 3, 1937.

ing military restrictions have been imposed in Czechoslovakia. All districts within 25 kilometers of the border and interior districts such as Saaz and Carlsbad have been declared "frontier zones" in which emergency law prevails even in peace time. Due to the narrow shape of the Republic, nearly half the total territory of Czechoslovakia and all but six of the 122 German majority districts in Bohemia and Moravia-Silesia, and 80 per cent of the total German minority, have thereby been included in the frontier zone. In these regions wide powers have been entrusted to special frontier police, many of whom have been drafted from the interior and understand little or no German, and military authorities have been given drastic powers of dismissal and expropriation.<sup>24</sup> Anyone considered "nationally unreliable" may not own, operate, or be employed in a number of industries considered to be of national importance. Germans complain that the interpretation of the term "reliability" can become very elastic in the hands of ardent Czech nationalists, and they claim that the law has made the benefits of democracy and guaranteed minority rights completely illusory for them.

The Czechs maintain that, in view of the attitude of many Sudetic Germans as well as the stand taken by the Reich, these precautionary measures are necessary in the interests of order and military defense. They also point to the fact that similar regulations have already been enforced in the frontier districts of Germany for several years.

#### MILITARY ASPECTS

Czechs state that Germany is not so much interested in securing better treatment for the Sudetic Germans as in furthering its own plans for eastward expansion and ultimate domination of Czechoslovakia. The Czechs claim the thesis often advanced by Germans that Czechoslovakia has no *Existenzberechtigung*—justification for existence—is merely part of this program. A strong Czechoslovakia, they feel, is a barrier impeding Germany's *Drang nach Osten* and keeps the Reich from fulfilling its "mission" in Central and Eastern Europe, as indicated in Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.

The Henleinists, echoing theories presented in the Reich, criticize the "Communist influence" of the Social Democratic and Marxist parties in Czechoslovakia. They contend that the alliance with the Soviet Union has made Czechoslovakia a "hotbed of Bolshevism" and a "Communist thrust at the heart of Central Europe," and that the new system of fortifications and airdromes was built at the insistence of its Soviet allies.

24. *Ibid.*

The Czechs state that Germany's present attack on the Czech-Soviet alliance is merely a continuation of pre-war German propaganda against the "Panslavist menace," and is a cloak for Germany's own expansionist aims.<sup>24a</sup> Germany's opposition, they contend, is better explained by Hitler's statement in *Mein Kampf* that Germany cannot tolerate a second strong military power as a neighbor.

Bismarck once stated: "Whoever is master of Bohemia is master of Europe." The Czechs and their allies are determined that Czechoslovakia and not Germany shall control this area. If Germany controlled the eastern slopes of the Sudetic mountains and the Moravian Gateway, they contend, Czechoslovakia would be at the mercy of the Reich. This is one of the reasons why territorial separation of the region inhabited by the troublesome Germans is out of the question as far as the Czechs are concerned.

Czech statesmen and strategists feel that it is their "mission" to hold up the German drive to the southeast for room and raw materials which will become acute if Germany's colonial demands are refused. In this policy Czechoslovakia is aided by its control of the middle Danube between Ems and Ipel, and by the shelter afforded by the mountain ranges of the Sudetes, Carpathians and Alps.<sup>25</sup>

Czechoslovakia's irregular and narrow shape does not make the task of defense any too easy, especially since hardly any of its 2,580 miles of frontier adjoin friendly territory.<sup>26</sup> The capital, Prague, is less than two hours' distance by plane from the frontier. With dissatisfied German, Hungarian, and Polish minorities ready to help invading armies, Czechoslovakia is in a vulnerable position since it could be pinched in two at its weakest and narrowest points in Moravia and Slovakia. The new Defense Law of March 1936 is aimed to minimize the dangers of such an invasion.

Czechoslovakia's miniature Maginot line of fortifications and devices blocking every main road leading to Germany, coupled with its efficient armament plants—Skoda, Vitkovice, and Brno—and trained fighting forces make the Republic the leading military power of the Little Entente. Although Czechoslovakia could probably not withstand German attack single-handed, Czechs feel that their fighting forces would be able to hold back a possible German offensive until their allies could come to their aid. This theory, of course, presupposes Ger-

many as the potential aggressor. Both Sudetic and Reich Germans deny that Germany has any intention whatsoever of attacking Czechoslovakia.

#### CONCLUSION

As this analysis has indicated, mutual distrust is one of the chief obstacles in the way of German-Czech rapprochement. Czechs fear that if they make too many concessions to the Germans, they will merely be strengthening their potential adversaries. It is understandable that the Czechs are anxious to safeguard the independence for which they fought so long. They realize that an armed conflict with Germany would mean a struggle for their very existence. Centuries of subordination have made it difficult for the Czechs to rule with the "effortless superiority" of the British, but this is to be explained partly by the constant fear of possible domination by Germans from within and without. This psychological factor has influenced the Republic's minority policy from the start.

From the Sudetic point of view, the economic distress in the Sudetenlands is very real. Although only a genuine revival of international trade can improve Sudetic economic conditions permanently, the state's minority policy might be revised where German claims of unfairness and discrimination in economic, social, and cultural fields are justified.

The rôle of the German Reich in this dispute is unfortunate but also understandable from the German point of view. Germany claims that it wants peace and has no designs on Czechoslovakia, and denies that its interest in the Sudetic minority is prompted by expansionist motives. The Germans feel that an injustice was done at the end of the World War by placing the German minority under Czechoslovak rule, and the broad masses of Reich Germans feel they should give their moral support to a movement directed at securing better treatment for the Sudetic Germans, just as they would for German minorities living in Poland and other European countries.

The Sudetic, Czechoslovak, and whole Central European problem is of international economic as well as political significance. With all its other faults, the old Austro-Hungarian Empire had the one virtue of constituting an economic unity in the Danubian basin. Since the war, to the detriment of all concerned, this unity has been disrupted, and the Succession States have surrounded themselves with almost insurmountable trade barriers. In any attempt to build up a sounder economic system in the Danubian basin—and signs of such attempts are becoming evident—Germany feels that it should

24a. Cf. Jaroslav Papoušek, *Czechoslovakia, Soviet Russia and Germany* (Prague, Orbis, 1936).

25. Cf. Colonel E. Moravec, *The Strategic Importance of Czechoslovakia for Western Europe* (Prague, Orbis, 1936).

26. Germany, Hungary, Poland and Austria are in varying degrees unfriendly to Czechoslovakia, Rumania being its only neighboring ally.

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# STRIFE IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA: THE GERMAN MINORITY QUESTION

not be permanently excluded from the economic life of Central Europe. Economically, both Germany and Czechoslovakia would stand to benefit by such cooperation.

If a more than temporary settlement is to be reached in Central Europe, Germany will have to be assured as much economic participation in that region as is compatible with the maintenance of the political independence and integrity of its eastern neighbors. To preserve the European balance of power, Britain and France will have to participate in such a settlement to insure that Germany's economic penetration does not mean political hegemony. If the great powers do not take an active part in guaranteeing the political *status quo*, the time may come when Germany will attempt a solution in its own way.

The internal aspects of the Sudetic problem are of more immediate significance. As has been indicated, strategic reasons require the inclusion of the Sudetic areas if Czechoslovakia's independence is to be assured. If the Germans are to remain permanently within the Czechoslovak Republic and are to become cooperating citizens, the basic attitude between the two races must change. Permanent internal peace can come to Czechoslovakia only when the German, Hungarian, and other minorities are satisfied through receiving a greater degree of cultural and political autonomy and a greater participation in the affairs of the Republic.

Although the economic distress in the Sudetic areas is not Czechoslovakia's fault, it is its misfortune. A moderate, statesmanlike policy will be necessary to convince the dissatisfied minorities that they have more to gain by loyalty to the Czechoslovak state than by irredentism. The first twenty years of the Republic's existence have not effaced century-old hatreds, but this does not mean that rapprochement is impossible. Viewed in the long run, if the Germans' economic condition is improved, and if they see continued evidence of the state's desire to secure their cooperation, they will become better citizens of Czechoslovakia. As such, they will not look so much to the Reich for support and will refuse to be an instrument for the realization of possible Reich aims. A policy of repression at present would involve the danger of straining to the breaking point the relations between the Czech state and the German minority, as well as between Czechoslovakia and the Third Reich. Fur-

ther Sudetic "incidents" might easily become the "provocation" leading Germany to take a step that would prove disastrous for all.

In the relations between the Germans and the Czechs, somewhere the circle of mutual distrust must be broken. Instead of being a wedge separating the two countries, the Sudetic minority, if it is given its proper place and accepts its responsibility, could form a cultural bridge between Germany and Czechoslovakia.

The abrupt consummation of Austro-German union has put Czechoslovakia in an unenviable position. Surrounded on three sides by a powerful and aggressive nation of 72,000,000 people, the country seems to be caught in a vise. The Sudetic minority was included in the 10,000,000 Germans beyond the Reich's frontiers over whom Hitler claimed a protectorate in his speech before the Reichstag on February 20. Now that the Fuehrer has incorporated 6,500,000 Austrians in Germany, will he put pressure on Czechoslovakia to obtain "freedom" for the Sudetic Germans? Austria he took without a shot. Unable to mobilize foreign assistance and not even assured the support of a majority of Austrians, the Schuschnigg régime capitulated before a show of force.

If faced with a similar threat, Czechoslovakia would undoubtedly fight. The Czechs and Slovaks are devoted to maintenance of their hard-won independence at all cost. They are resentful of foreign intervention in their internal affairs. They have a modern, well-equipped army capable of offering staunch resistance. Yet their ability to withstand attack will depend on the help given by France and Britain. Both these powers did nothing to prevent or undo the *fait accompli* in Austria. Today both are alarmed over Germany's advance into Central and Southeastern Europe. France is ready to come to Czechoslovakia's assistance provided Britain lends its support. Speaking in the House of Commons on March 14, Prime Minister Chamberlain gave no indication that Britain would be prepared to join France in an unequivocal warning to Hitler that they would tolerate no attack or even overt pressure on Czechoslovakia. Only when freed of the menace of attack, will the Czechoslovak government feel safe in making those concessions which would put the Sudetic Germans on a plane of genuine equality with the other nationalities in the country.